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Two Roads To Continuity

By Tom Wicker

When John Kennedy was narrowly elected President in 1960, the first Catholic and one of the youngest men ever to serve in the office, virtually his first official act was the reappointment of J. Edgar Hoover as director of the F.B.I. and of Allen Dulles as director of the C.I.A.

Mr. Kennedy's motives were clear. As in his later appointments of Republicans to the Treasury and Defense Departments, he wanted to reassure the nation that he was not a radical or a novice, but a leader who would put sound, responsible men—as they were widely seen in 1960—in sensitive positions. Even so, and despite later revelations about Mr. Hoover's and Mr. Dulles's leadership, their reappointments served the second purpose of keeping their important offices out of partisan politics.

Sixteen years later, another narrowly elected "outsider," as President-elect, obviously feels the same need to reassure the nation. Just as important, the principle needs to be re-established that the directorships of the F.B.I. and the C.I.A. are not political plums to be handed out every time a different party takes power in Washington.

In the case of the C.I.A., not only have there been three directors in the last four years, but the current director, George Bush, is a former chairman

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of the Republican National Committee. As Ambassador to the United Nations and the American representative in Peking, however, Mr. Bush had useful experience for the C.I.A. post and by all reports has performed capably in it. President-elect Carter spoke well of him after Mr. Bush had briefed him on the world situation.

Mr. Bush has announced that he plans to leave the C.I.A. on Jan. 20, which gives Mr. Carter ample freedom of action. Whether he would consider reappointing Mr. Bush is not known, but there are several reasons why he might. It would re-establish the principle that the job does not necessarily change hands when the Administration does. Another new director so soon would not necessarily be good for an agency shaken hard by recent disclosures of its abuses and ineptitudes. And a year or two from now, while Mr. Bush could leave with the principle of continuity intact, Mr. Carter would have had that much more time to consider the kind of man he should put into the C.I.A. directorship, presumably to serve into the Administration that would follow his.

Should such a long-term appointee be an intelligence professional, a knowledgeable outsider, a trusted associate of the President? Or, if Mr. Carter's Government reorganization plans should drastically change the shape and nature of the C.I.A., might some altogether different need be felt in a year or so? Extending Mr. Bush's tenure for a while would provide time for these and other questions to be pursued, and his own expertise might be helpful in answering them.

On the other hand, reassuring the nation requires Mr. Carter to replace Clarence Kelley as director of the F.B.I. With all due respect to Mr. Kelley, who brought some good qualities to the job, he has been tarnished by allegations of minor personal improprieties, and even more so by the disclosure that some illicit bureau activities continued without his knowledge and despite his public assurances that an end had been put to such outrages.

Nor has Mr. Kelley shown the kind of leadership either to cast off the remaining influences on the bureau of J. Edgar Hoover's half century at its head or to mend its morale and reputation after the shattering disclosures of recent years. For Mr. Carter, however, the resulting need to replace Mr. Kelley poses a problem. Richard Nixon made a political appointment—that of L. Patrick Gray—to follow J. Edgar Hoover, and the unfortunate consequences should be warning enough to the President-elect.

He needs to make, that is, a clearly unpartisan choice to head the F.B.I., a nominee unchallengeable on professional grounds and acceptable both to liberals fearful of the bureau's past carelessness about the legal and constitutional rights of individuals and to those rightfully concerned that the F.B.I. should be a tough and effective investigative force. This is not an easy prescription, but what is needed is the kind of director who would be wanted to continue in office by a Republican President, should one be elected in 1980 or 1984.

One man reported to be under consideration who might meet such requirements is Patrick Murphy, formerly the Police Commissioner of Washington, D.C., Detroit and New York City, now the head of the Police Foundation. Although Mr. Murphy served briefly in the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration at the end of the Johnson Administration, he is fundamentally a police professional, without partisan identification, who has earned the respect of liberals and minority groups as well as that of other policemen.

Whether his appointee is Mr. Murphy or someone with equal qualifications, Mr. Carter ought also to couple his nomination with legislation to establish a set term of office for the F.B.I. director. Five, seven or nine years—it would not matter too much—as long as the possibility of another Hooverian reign were foreclosed.